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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Letter dated 16 May 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of the Oslo Consensus on 20/20 (see annex). This document is the result of a meeting held at Oslo from 23 to 25 April 1996 among interested Governments and multilateral organizations to review the implementation of the 20/20 initiative, as described in the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development at Copenhagen and reconfirmed by the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 45.

(Signed) Jakken BIØRN LIAN
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

The Oslo Consensus on 20/20

1. As a follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, held at Copenhagen in March 1995, the Governments of Norway and the Netherlands invited a number of interested countries and multilateral organizations that met at Oslo from 23 to 25 April 1996 to review the implementation of the 20/20 initiative, as described in the Programme of Action of the Summit and reconfirmed by the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing.

2. The 20/20 initiative is also part of the commitment made at Copenhagen to increase significantly and/or utilize more efficiently the resources allocated to social development in order to achieve the goals of the Summit. Measures to that effect include implementation of debt-relief agreements and striving for the fulfilment of the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for overall official development assistance as soon as possible.

3. The meeting was convened to pursue a common ambition to achieve universal access to basic social services over an ambitious but realistic time period, by reorienting existing and mobilizing additional resources as well as increasing cost-effectiveness, efficiency and quality in service delivery.

4. The meeting reaffirmed that investing in a country's human resources, in particular women and children, means investing in its future and is fundamental to realizing its full potential for social and economic development. Promoting access for all to basic social services was considered essential for sustainable development and should be an integral part of any strategy to overcome poverty.

5. The meeting reviewed strategies and modalities for how universal access to basic social services can be pursued through concerted national and international action based on the 20/20 initiative.

6. The meeting reached the following conclusions.

Giving priority to basic social services

7. The meeting recognized that the objective of eradicating absolute poverty requires a broad range of policies and actions at all levels. An appropriate economic framework based on sound macroeconomic policies, a well-developed infrastructure, strengthened institutions and capacity, as well as meeting basic human needs such as shelter, and providing social welfare, were recognized as key factors for addressing the poverty problem.

8. Within the framework of this overall objective, the meeting considered that development of basic social services was of particular importance in reducing the worst aspects of poverty and is a key element in breaking the poverty cycle.

9. To this end, the meeting reaffirmed that developing countries should take the lead and set the priorities. Within this context, developing country

Governments were encouraged to prepare basic social programmes, as part of the poverty reduction strategy suggested by the Social Summit, with the aim of achieving universal access to basic social services over an ambitious but realistic time period. It was recognized by the meeting that such programmes and strategies should be country specific in order to do justice to each country's particular problems and circumstances.

10. The meeting invited donor countries and multilateral agencies to express their readiness to provide technical and financial support for the preparation and implementation of such programmes as well as action plans within individual sectors.

The 20/20 objective: pursuing a mutual commitment

11. In this context, the 20/20 concept was considered useful for giving higher priority to basic social services. The main focus of the 20/20 initiative should be the effective and efficient delivery of basic social services to the poor and vulnerable segments of the populations.

12. Within the context of this 20/20 initiative, the meeting understood basic social services as comprising basic education and primary health care, including reproductive health and population programmes, nutrition programmes and safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as the institutional capacity for delivering those services. Access to these services should be universal, while targeting the poorest and most vulnerable.

13. The thrust of the 20/20 initiative reflects a mutual commitment by developing countries and their development partners to give higher priority to basic social services and to translate this commitment into financial terms. This should be done on a predictable basis in order to achieve sustainable and universal access. Achieving adequate provision of basic social services to the poor will, however, not only require financial resources, emphasis must also be put on both the quality and efficiency with which services are provided.

14. The meeting recognized the importance of implementing the 20/20 initiative on a reciprocal basis. Interested developed and developing country partners should reflect their mutual commitment by allocating, on average, 20 per cent of official development assistance, including contributions through multilateral organizations and non-governmental organizations and 20 per cent of the national budgets (net of aid), respectively, to basic social services, as soon as possible and preferably by the year 2000.

Follow-up action at the country level

15. The meeting invited interested developing countries and donor Governments and multilateral organizations to review policy frameworks, plans of action and basic social services programmes, with identified national and external financing requirements, in all appropriate forums, in particular consultative group and round-table meetings. The World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were considered to have special responsibilities

for assisting interested countries in the preparation of the required analysis of social sector development.

16. Governments were urged to cooperate closely with civil society. The meeting emphasized the strong role to be played by local government and local communities in the whole process in fulfilling the goals of social development. The meeting encouraged the involvement of civil society, such as non-governmental organizations, to play an active role in design, implementation and monitoring of basic social programmes.

17. The meeting agreed that monitoring progress in social indicators and financial flows can play an important role in securing the adequate expansion of basic social services and in alerting policy makers when extra efforts and reforms may be needed to achieve set objectives.

18. Developing countries, supported by their development partners, should strive to establish budget structures and social and economic data collection systems which would enable them to review budget allocations as well as to monitor their performance in terms of social indicators.

19. The meeting agreed that public expenditure reviews should be further developed and refined in order to improve their usefulness for monitoring budget allocations for basic social services.

20. Developing countries represented at the Oslo meeting expressed their readiness to invite their multilateral and bilateral development partners to enter into a dialogue on how to pursue the objectives of the 20/20 initiative in their countries. A number of countries informed that they had concrete plans to launch pilot programmes under the 20/20 initiative.

21. Developed countries represented at the Oslo meeting expressed their readiness to enter into such dialogues with the intent to follow up this 20/20 initiative.

22. The multilateral organizations represented at the Oslo meeting expressed their readiness to support developing countries in the formulation and implementation of social sector programmes in favour of the poor, and in the monitoring and analysis of budget expenditure on basic social services, their cost-effectiveness and their impact on social indicators.

Follow-up action at the international level

23. Member countries should invite the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to adopt reporting systems that will enable it to collect official development assistance information for the purpose of monitoring the official development assistance share allocated to basic social services. Developed countries should increase efforts to provide data on assistance for basic social services using existing reporting systems. DAC member countries were also urged to pay special attention to support for basic social services in their peer review consultations.

24. Multilateral development agencies were encouraged to adopt reporting systems compatible to those of DAC and to make data on their 20/20 performance available to DAC.

25. Governments were encouraged to incorporate information on progress with regard to investments in basic social services into the formal, intergovernmental follow-up and reporting cycle related to the World Summit for Social Development, taking into account the need for an integrated follow-up to and reporting on recent major United Nations conferences.

26. Governments and organizations were called upon to put the follow-up to this Oslo Consensus on the agenda of the appropriate international forums in order to further its implementation and effectiveness in promoting universal access to basic social services, inter alia, through the mobilization of resources.

27. The meeting agreed that the potential of existing mechanisms for international cooperation between donors and developing countries as follow-up forums for the 20/20 initiative should be explored.

28. The participants in the Oslo meeting agreed that a follow-up meeting should be held within two years to exchange information and experience and to review and assess progress in implementing the 20/20 initiative. The host country, Norway, took on a clear responsibility of ensuring that such a follow-up meeting would take place in one or two years' time. It was agreed that at the next meeting discussions should focus and build on the concrete experiences of individual developing countries and their development partners in implementing the 20/20 initiative. It was also agreed that the next meeting would address the issue of clarifying and monitoring the inputs and outputs of the 20/20 initiative. The meeting noted with appreciation that the Netherlands offered the assistance of some experts to further develop and elaborate the monitoring instruments.